Coalition of Hmong Students

This was our ancestor’s story:
The Hmong people are an ethnic group that immigrated from China to Laos, Thailand, and various other countries in search of freedom. Throughout this time, the history of the Hmong people was embellished in their fine and artistic needlework, known as paj ntaub. One of the most beautiful forms of Hmong needle art is the story cloth. Many story cloths depict narratives of Hmong traditional life in the mountains and highlands of Laos and Thailand. Others portray events in Hmong history, such as their involvement with the United States during the Vietnam War, the aftermath of the war, and their journey to the Thailand then to the United States and other countries after the war.

The story cloth shown in this art exhibit tells the story of our ancestors and parents in Laos and Thailand, illuminating the Hmong culture. It stresses the importance of religious traditions as shown in depictions of shamanism. It also highlights the family and their involvement in the harvesting process. For example, at the bottom and at the top of the story, it depicts members of a Hmong family harvesting and processing rice. To understand the narrative that describes the harvesting process, the viewer begins at the bottom of the story cloth and ends at the top of the cloth.

This is our story:
Not a lot is known about the Hmong, however, in history the Hmong people are known for their struggles in the Vietnam War. While this is part of the struggles of the Hmong people and their community, there is still more to learn. For example, there is less focus on the Hmong youth’s struggle to adapt to American culture. Some of us were born in the United States; others were born in refugee camps in Thailand. Regardless of where we all started our lives, we encountered similar experiences in the United States, such as living with refugee parents, and struggling to learn English. As first and second generation Hmong students in college, we went through struggles with self-identification in determining who we really are. While our ethnicity and traditional culture tell us that we are Hmong and that our values revolve around our family. The assimilation into the American culture tells us that we are free and should be independent. This process of struggling to define our identities is what makes us understand who we really are. This process taught us to embrace and appreciate both cultures. Yet, the fight to find who we really are is not over. Each one of us has a unique story with different struggles. We all have different understandings and experiences regarding race, discrimination, and oppression. This is why members of the Coalition of Hmong Students have presented a story quilt of their own, describing our story as Hmong Americans to show the struggle of what each of us have to go through to get to where we are today.

What is your story?:
Our experiences as Hmong American students are influenced and shaped by people with whom we interact with, which makes you a part of our stories. We hope you can share with us your experiences and struggles of your own identity and family or group history. On a square sheet provided, please artistically show us your story and experiences as Americans, just like how our ancestors have embellished their history on a Hmong story cloth.